

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

FIGUIER'S SCIENCE OF THE FUTURE LIFE.—*To-morrow of Death; or, the Future Life according to Science.* By L. S. CROCHET. Translated from the French, by R. S. CROCHET. \$1.00, pp. 350. Roberts Brothers.

M. Figuier has acquired a certain favorable reputation in the literary, rather than the scientific world, by his successful attempt to present the conclusions of modern physical science in a popular form. His works on the "Earth and Sea" and on "Primitive Man" have had a wide circulation, and certainly form an agreeable pastime for readers who wish to partake of the fruits of knowledge without the trouble of personal research. He is also the compiler of some interesting historical and biographical sketches, in which he displays a singular talent for reaping where others have sown, and arranging the accumulations of their labor in a shapely bundle of autumn sheaves. We do not understand that he makes any pretensions to original discovery in the field of science. His name is not connected with the magnificent results of physical experiment and research, which are the glory of the age, except as an interpreter, or rather a showman. He is the Barnum of science, but not its Herschel, Kirchoff, Helmholtz, Bunsen, or Tyndall.

In the present volume, however, M. Figuier has struck into a new path, and aims at no less vast an achievement than the solution of the problem of a future life by scientific methods, and the establishment of a complete theory of Nature which shall explain the integral and ultimate philosophy of the Universe.

The ambitions of his design is equalled only by the conspicuous failure of its execution.

Instead of dealing with exact science, M. Figuier merely brings forward a museum of personal fancies. To certain tastes these may, perhaps, be no less attractive than the display of glittering colors on the stuffed skins of beast, bird, and reptile in a zoological gallery; but they are equally destitute of inward vitality, and if pretending to the qualities of natural life, excite no emotion but scorn and disgust.

If M. Figuier had presented his theories in the guise of a fine Utopian romance, his work might have afforded amusement, if not instruction, to a large class of readers.

Although it is an immeasurable distance below the sublime visions of Dante the supramundane creations of Milton, and even the picturesque descriptions of Heaven and Hell by the Swedish seer, it has no better claims to scientific truth than those masterpieces of the poetic faculty, in which imagination, or inspiration, if you please, has assumed the place of reason and research.

What M. Figuier propounds as the result of scientific inquiry is a matter of pure invention.

Assuming the truth of his statements in regard to the facts of science, there is a hideous chasm between them and his conclusions.

In many cases, his premises are built on unauthorised assumptions, and in no case do they involve the consequences which he puts forward as demonstration.

His reasoning, indeed, is often not only so illogical, but so preposterously absurd, that, if it were not for his evidently earnest purpose and conviction, his book might be regarded as a burlesque on the attempt to reconcile religion and science, instead of a serious treatise.

It is hardly worth the space which it will occupy in our columns to give a rapid view of the method by which M. Figuier undertakes to improve upon Christianity in his illustrations of life and immortality, but to save the curious reader from wasting his attention over an unprofitable book we will devote a little time to the attempt.

The scientific theory of a future life, which according to M. Figuier presents a complete solution of the problem of immortality, is based upon the conception of a planetary ether beyond the limits of the terrestrial atmosphere. This ether, the properties of which are as minutely described by the author, as if he had submitted it to the test of chemical analysis, is a rarefied gas considerably thinner than the atmosphere, distributed about the earth and the other planets of the solar system, and, in fact, filling all space.

Though the exact composition of the planetary ether has not yet been made out, it probably contains no oxygen, as respiration becomes more difficult as we ascend to the upper portions of the atmosphere. The human being, exalted and refined by his several incarnations in his vast journey through the heavens, so exalted at the same, enjoys the condition of pure spirit. He is divested of all material substance, all carnal alloy. He is a flame, a breath, all intelligence, sentiment, thought; no impurity mingleth with his perfect essence. He is an absolute soul, a soul without a body. The blinding mass that constitutes the Sun is set apart for these beings that have attained the quintessence of immortality. A throne of fire must be the throne of souls.

The scientific absurdity of this volume culminates with the author's theory of the constitution of the Sun. It exhibits in an aggregation of souls, and the rays of light that are transmitted to the planets are the emanations of those souls. This is the only rational explanation, according to M. Figuier, of the solar light and heat. The solar radiation is sustained by the constant influx of souls into the sun. These ardent and pure spirits come to take the place of the emanations constantly transmitted by the Sun through space upon the globes that surround him.

"This theory as to the conservation of the solar force," the author adds, "with a rather suspicious demeanor, 'we can advance with some confidence, since Science has no exact information to give us on the point in question, and philosophy only fills up a gulf between astronomy and physics.'

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We have passed judgment on this work on the ground assumed by M. Figuier that it is a serious attempt to apply the conclusions of physical science to the support of the immortality of the soul. In this point of view, it must be pronounced nothing but a senseless comedy. It may be wiser after all to regard it as an experiment of imaginative invention, like Robinson Crusoe, or the famous "Mona Lisa," but in that case it calls for a still more decided condemnation for the forgeries of its irony, and the coarse extravagance of its humor.

The work contains several neat astronomical descriptions, which might be transferred, with advantage, to the popular class-books on the subject, but beyond that its attempts are a failure, and its pretensions a fraud.

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